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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 LUSAKA 000868

SIPDIS

STATE FOR AF/S JNAMDE

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [ZA](#)

SUBJECT: ZAMBIAN VOTERS ASK FOR "CHANGE" -- RULING MMD
PARTY LOSES KEY LOCAL BY-ELECTION

REF: LUSAKA 730

Classified By: Ambassador Donald E. Booth for reasons 1.4 (d)

SUMMARY

1. (C) SUMMARY: The opposition United Party for National Development (UPND)-Patriotic Front (PF) Pact took a ruling Movement for Multi-Party Democracy (MMD) parliament seat on November 19 when its candidate, UPND's Watson Lumba, defeated Albert Chifita in the Solwezi Central Member of Parliament by-election. Until his death in September, influential Solwezi politician and former Minister of Housing Benny Tetashimba had held the seat since 2001, first as a UPND member, then with MMD after switching parties in 2006. The Pact campaigned on a message of "change" that resonated with voters who have become increasingly disillusioned with the ruling MMD. The election was marred by low voter turnout, electoral misconduct by both sides, and isolated instances of violence. Lumba's decisive victory (54.4 percent to 42.8 percent) over Chifita indicates that the UPND-PF Pact is capable of beating the MMD on its own turf and that the MMD could be vulnerable in the 2011 national elections if the Pact can stay together and rally both parties' supporters behind a common candidate in constituencies and for president. END SUMMARY.

2. (SBU) United Party for National Development (UPND) candidate Watson Lumba defeated ruling Movement for Multiparty Democracy (MMD) Party candidate Albert Chifita in the November 19 Solwezi Central Member of Parliament by-election to fill the Member of Parliament (MP) seat left vacant following the death of former Minister of Housing Benny Tetamashimba. Lumba received 54.4 percent of the 10,417 total votes cast to Chifita's 42.8 percent. Other candidates were non-factors in the race.

3. (C) Capitalizing on what local officials described as an anti-incumbent mood, Pact supporters chanted "vote for change" at rallies and in the streets. NGO Foundation for Democratic Process regional director Felix Laputa said that many voters turned away from the MMD for being corrupt, ineffectual, and for making too many false promises. The Pact candidate won 20 of 30 precincts and outpolled the MMD by three-to-one in large, poorer precincts previously carried by Tetamashimba. Although he won the seat in 2001 representing UPND, Tetamashimba switched to the MMD in 2006 and defeated Lumba to hold his seat. Local officials posited that it was Tetamashimba's local star power rather than support for MMD that helped the ruling party carry the district in the 2006 elections and secure a strong victory in the 2008 presidential by-election, where President Banda received 65% of the Solwezi vote. Voter turnout was reported to be about 30 percent, dampened by a lack of economic opportunities, which force many voters to travel outside the district for work, and heavy rains.

¶4. (C) The Pact and MMD fought hard to win in Solwezi, seeing it as a potential bellwether for the 2011 national parliamentary and presidential elections. President Banda, Vice President George Kunda, and several Cabinet ministers -- including Foreign Minister Kabinga Pande, a representative of nearby Kasempa district -- blanketed the district to drum up MMD support. UPND leader Hakainde Hichilema and PF leader Michael Sata also made appearances in the area. Supporters on both sides were reportedly guilty of numerous acts of fraud and isolated violence leading up to the election. Although Zambian police assigned 300 officers to beef up security in the area, MMD and UPND-PF supporters clashed with rocks and sticks, sending several to the hospital and damaging vehicles. Both campaigns resorted to electioneering tactics common to Zambia, including trading food, fuel and money for votes, transporting voters to polling stations, and making pledges of substantial investment in district development, to win votes (reftel).

¶5. (C) COMMENT: Although the Solwezi by-election was hampered by low voter turnout and campaign dirty tricks on both sides, the Pact's victory was decisive, and could be a catalyst for further erosion of MMD support in Northwest Province. Voter frustration with the MMD appears to be increasing, at least in Solwezi, with even self-described MMD members telling Poloff that they were discouraged by the acquittal of former president Frederick Chiluba on corruption charges and the direction the country is going under Banda's rule. Whether the Pact can capitalize on this frustration depends on if they can remain united in the run-up to national elections in 2011 and rally its supporters to a single presidential candidate and common parliamentary

LUSAKA 00000868 002 OF 002

candidates in all districts. END COMMENT.
BOOTH